



Gallatin City-County Health Department

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MDOL, Gallatin Commissioners Reopen Spanish Creek Road

The Montana Department of Livestock (MDOL) and Gallatin County Commissioners will be reopening the popular and heavily used Spanish Creek Road Friday evening.

The road was closed on August 3 by the Gallatin County Commission at the request of MDOL because of an anthrax outbreak in domestic bison at the Flying D Ranch. Dr. Marty Zaluski, state veterinarian with MDOL, said the road was closed to protect the integrity of the department's livestock quarantine.

"The closure allowed us to work cooperatively with the ranch to quarantine and treat animals that may have been exposed to the disease and to dispose of carcasses," Zaluski said. "The control measures implemented have been effective in containing the disease, and we're comfortable recommending that the road be reopened to public use."

Zaluski said the area will remain under a livestock quarantine for 42 days after the last death attributed to anthrax. In the meantime, travelers using the road should keep pets inside vehicles, and horses should not be unloaded until travelers reach the U.S. Forest Service campgrounds. Additionally, hikers, campers and others recreating in the area should, as always, avoid handling animal carcasses; fresh wildlife carcasses should be reported, along with the location, to the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks Region 3 office in Bozeman at 406/994-4042.

Gallatin County Commissioner Joe Skinner said signs will be posted at the entrance of the quarantine area, along the road and at the U.S. Forest Service boundary outlining rules for road users to follow.

"Everyone is in agreement that it's time to reopen the road, but people will still have to respect the livestock quarantine," Skinner said.

The disease killed 257 bison since the outbreak began approximately three weeks ago. The number of bison deaths per day, however, has been steadily falling for the past nine days, Zaluski said.

Anthrax is caused by a naturally occurring bacteria, *Bacillus anthracis*. Spores of the bacteria can lie dormant in the soil for decades then become active under certain conditions, typically after climatic or ecologic changes such as heavy rains

or flooding preceded by drought. Animals are exposed to the disease by grazing or consuming forage or water contaminated with spores.

Outbreaks have also occurred this summer in North Dakota and, more recently, Saskatchewan.

Zaluski said there is no way of knowing when or where the disease will pop up.

"There's just no way to tell," Zaluski said. "To err on the side of caution, though, I would think that cattle producers in the area with similar soil types will be vaccinating their cattle for the next few years."

Risk factors for anthrax outbreaks include:

- A history of anthrax in the area;
- Alkaline soil types;
- Heavy rains that are followed by periods of mid- to late summer drought.

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